Power, Death and the Value of the Body in Late Capitalism: Anohni's "Drone Bomb Me"

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Introduction

The lead single of Anohni's 2016 album *Hopelessness*, "Drone Bomb Me", begins with a shocking imperative: the speaker demands that the addressee eliminate her by dropping a bomb on her: "Explode my crystal guts / Lay my purple on the grass".[1] Surely, her forthright urge to die is eerie, unsettling. What is even more unsettling, though, is the fact that we are not given any explicit reasons which might help explain her motivation. Is she tired of living? If so, then she is willing to break one of the most potent taboos in our societies, namely the one forbidding suicide: suicide as an empty act, an act that is not simply meaningless within the larger order of things, but that in fact seems to threaten that larger order. Or may we categorise her death wish as self-sacrifice, the symbolic giving of life in order to ensure life? The question remains: why does she resist survival?

In the following, Anohni's song, as well as the video which accompanied its release, will be treated as symptomatic of the late-capitalist structure of feeling. Starting from Jean Baudrillard's idea that power in contemporary consumer societies is based on the deferral of death, I will discuss how the aestheticized representation of postmodern drone warfare in "Drone Bomb Me" refers to, yet also extends, Michel Foucault's analysis of modern disciplinary societies, particularly by reflecting on the status of the body and the value it can carry in late capitalism. In short, it will be shown how the texts under discussion, on the one hand, have been inescapably codified and hence productively shaped by late-capitalist power relations, while, on the other, they seek to actively recodify them in such a way as to make resistance conceivable.

[1] All quotations from the lyrics on Anohni's *Hopelessness* are taken from the CD booklet. The lyrics of "Drone Bomb Me" can be found on various websites, for example here: <http://genius.com/Anohni-drone-bomb-me-lyrics>.

Western Consumer Societies and the Deferral of Death

To figure out why the speaker in "Drone Bomb Me" resists survival, it is worthwhile to consider this notion in some detail first. 'Survival', it can be claimed, is a historically contingent category; it has had different meanings in different societies at different points in time. In *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Jean Baudrillard has even gone so far as to assert not only that it is a distinctly modern category, but, more importantly, that "[t]he emergence of survival can […] be analysed as the fundamental operation in the birth of power" (1993: 129). Simply put, his argument runs as follows: in archaic, pre-modern societies, death was irreducibly connected to life. In such societies, Baudrillard argues, death is not understood as something radically *different*, as the meaningless absolute Other to the substantive fullness of life through which we define ourselves as individual subjects. Rather, death and life are caught up in a symbiotic relationship; they both have *value* and hence can be symbolically exchanged with each other, which in turn – via initiation rites, burial rites, etc. – forms the basis of social cohesion (cf. 1993: 131).

In contrast, in Western societies since the 16th century, death has been ousted from life. Instead of understanding life and death as symbolically intertwined, life alone has come to be considered as representing reality. In other words, to *be real* means *to live*; to live means to be real. However, and this is the decisive point, in order for life to claim this monopoly on reality, death needs to be pushed into the sphere of the imaginary. Only by imagining death as the unimaginable beyond of life, as that which puts an end to reality, is life-as-reality formed in the first place. Baudrillard writes: "The *effect of the real* is only ever therefore the structural effect of the disjunction between two terms, and our famous reality principle, with its normative and repressive implications, is only a generalisation of this disjunctive code to all levels" (1993: 133). An answer to the question why, for Baudrillard, survival functions as the condition of possibility of modern power, requires a more detailed consideration, though: it is vital to understand why, according to him, the separation of life and death has "normative and repressive implications", and also in which ways this "disjunctive code" can be 'generalised' "to all levels".

Since, for people in modern consumer societies, life alone is real while death functions as the imaginary other that puts an end to reality, it is essential to defer death. This implies that, instead of a circular understanding of time, a linear and hence progressive understanding of time is taken for granted: as much time as possible needs to be accumulated in life in order to push back – defer – death for as long as possible. As a motor ensuring the efficiency of this endeavour, modern medicine, for instance, has been instrumental (cf. Foucault 1977). Especially in the last two centuries, life expectancy has risen enormously, particularly in the Western world (cf. Roser 2016). If death is not exchangeable with life anymore, precisely because it is considered to be

outside the system, the value of life will have to be measured against other 'goods': material and consumer goods, of course, but also 'abstract' goods locatable at the intersections of discourse axes like class, profession, 'race', ethnicity, gender, and age. In analogy to the establishment of the notion of time as progressive, these 'goods' have to be embedded in an ideology of growth: the economic master discourse of modernity, namely capitalism, has unflinchingly preached the gospel of growth; a kind of growth which, in order to defer the death of the system, must be conceived of as an 'eternal' and 'natural' condition within a progressing temporal trajectory. In Russell West-Pavlov's words: "Time's attributes of linearity […], universality, quantifiability and commodifiability […], and finally contemporaneity and modernity […] all work to structure human existence according to the restrictive but profitable mechanisms of late capitalism" (2013: 5). Within capitalism's own mythical narrative, the notion of the potentially eternal accumulation of capital signifies as the promise of national, social and individual wellbeing, a paradise in the here and now.

> The infinity of capital passes into the infinity of time, the eternity of a productive system no longer familiar with the reversibility of gift-exchange, but instead with the irreversibility of quantitative growth. The accumulation of time imposes the idea of progress, as the accumulation of science imposes the idea of truth: in each case, what is accumulated is no longer symbolically exchanged, but becomes an *objective* dimension. (Baudrillard 1993: 146)

The paradox inherent in this logic is that, by making symbolic exchange impossible, by excluding death, the system deadens itself. After all, capitalism, as Baudrillard remarks, will only function on the grounds of the non-presence of a certain commodity in exactly the moment when its presence is required. Yet scarcity is not simply a given; rather, in consumer societies – societies in which consumption is largely detached from physical survival – scarcity is produced. Consumers will buy a particular product if the desire to own it has been instilled in them first. Only if I feel to be somehow incomplete will I have the urge to seek completion by filling the gap. Hence, wholeness depends on lack; life is dependent on death, but without granting 'death' its due.

The banking crisis of 2007/8 has exposed the precariousness of capitalism's myth of eternal accumulation. The current plans (at the time of writing, i.e. December 2016) by the Eurogroup to relieve Greece from its enormous debt burden, for example, envisage a long-term reduction of 20% by 2060 (cf. ESM 2016). While the promised reduction is depressingly low and the time during which to accomplish it fantastically long – so long indeed that it can safely be called unrealistic – the implementation of austerity measures (cuts in health services, pension funds etc.) will greatly impact both the quality of life and life expectancy in Greece. In short, the reinstallation of a system allowing the renewed accumulation of wealth is dependent on the management of a prior accumulation of debt through austerity.

Panopticism and Postmodern Warfare

Why is all of this relevant for an understanding of the song, "Drone Bomb Me"? What do such reflections on the nature of Western consumer societies have to do with a scenario that seems to refer us to contemporary warfare, particularly in Syria, in Iraq, in Afghanistan? Admittedly, in the song, none of these places is named explicitly. The setting could be anywhere. In fact, the mention of "mountains" and "the sea" does not so much indicate actual, geographically identifiable regions as tap into particular artistic conventions. As elements of a piece of pop culture, these terms rather invoke the aesthetic concept of the sublimity of nature, yet only to immediately discard it again, to expose the emptiness of this very concept.

According to Kant's influential theorising of the sublime in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, nature itself can indeed be credited with having power, but only in relation to us, to the power we possess as human beings facing nature. He explains in the subchapter "On nature as a power" (§28): "*Power* is a capacity that is superior to great obstacles. The same thing is called *dominion* if it is also superior to the resistance of something that itself possesses power. Nature considered in aesthetic judgment as a power that has no dominion over us is *dynamically sublime*" (2000: 143 [5: 260]). What is decisive is that there is a distance between nature and the observer: a distance created by the fact that, in aesthetic judgment, nature is never experienced directly, but rather indirectly. Nature is represented in and mediated by the work of art so that, ultimately, we can "consider an object as *fearful* without being afraid *of* it" (2000: 144). In the long run, then, the wide ocean, enraged by storms", terrible as it appears, "cannot be called sublime" (2000: 129; §23 [5: 245]). Actually, it is by our contemplation of the stormy ocean, by the way in which its artful presentation incites fearful feelings within us, that we discover our *own* sublimity *as human beings*.

As suggested above, while activating these notions, Anohni's song at the same time turns them against themselves. This is so because the speaking observer – with whom we inescapably identify due to the use of the grammatical shifter 'I' – is not awed by the sublimity of nature which would in turn allow her to discover herself. On the contrary, the unfathomable sublime other is not represented by the mountains and the sea, but by the drone. The drone, of course, is not a natural entity; it is a technical device: a technical device, moreover, that does not offer itself to visual contemplation. Instead, it remains hidden throughout the song, but we know that – should the moment ever arrive in which it becomes tangible – this will simultaneously be the moment in which the speaker's presence will be eliminated. Although the bomb-carrying drone is evidently absent, then, its dominating power is all the more imminent: the speaker anthropomorphises the drone, apostrophises it as if *it* heard and saw *her*. And after all, it probably can see her, or at least its operator can. On the surface, this is reminiscent of

Michel Foucault's famous description of the working of power in modernity – power as an invisible panoptic force that, by its *felt* presence, both *disciplines* and *constitutes* its subjects:

> He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. By this very fact, the external power may throw off its physical weight; it tends to the non-corporal; and, the more it approaches this limit, the more constant, profound and permanent are its effects: it is a perpetual victory that avoids any physical confrontation and which is always decided in advance. (1995: 202f)

However, while the drone due to its absence is indeed 'non-corporal' and hence meets the requirements of Foucault's conception of 'external power', the fulfilment of the concomitant mission, namely to become the means of panoptic subjection, is thwarted not so much by its own ultimate destiny, namely to (self-)destroy, but rather by the speaker herself. Her very intentions show that she has not yet fully inscribed within herself the ratio of the system. While the aim of the discipline imposed by the panoptic schema is "to strengthen the social forces – to increase production, to develop the economy, spread education, raise the level of public morality; to increase and multiply" (Foucault 1995: 208), Anohni's speaker is intent on achieving the exact opposite: instead of multiplication and propagation, she insists on destruction; instead of being an asset to production by setting her body and mind to disciplined work, she declines to be productive. And she does so actively, which is tantamount to a refusal to be a victim.[2]

Indeed, the lyrically phrased, but at the same time starkly violent, graphic images transported by her injunctions to the bomb and its controller even seem to imply the willingness to return to pre-modern forms of spectacular punishment: "Blow my head off / Explode my crystal guts / Lay my purple on the grass." While we do not know why she is punished, we know it is she who demands the punishment. It is she who requests that her body be ripped apart for all to see. She wants this to be a public spectacle. After all, she is not alone. We, the listeners, are her audience; it is we who are summoned by the song to (imaginatively) witness the spectacle. As Foucault argues, before the reform of the punitive system set in during the eighteenth century, the point of application of punishment was the body, not the mind. Punishment, particularly for capital offences, was public, and not hidden in the discreet spaces of the prison. The tortured body itself functioned as proof of the truth of the investigation. Most importantly, perhaps, "[t]he public execution is to be understood not only as a judicial, but also as a political ritual" (Foucault 1995: 47). This is so because each crime implicitly always also constituted an

[2] For another exploration of panopticism, consider Anohni's "Watch Me" (also on *Hopelessness*).

attack on the sovereign, who represented the law, and vice versa: the law represented the sovereign.

> The public execution […] is a ceremonial by which a momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted. It restores that sovereignty by manifesting it at its most spectacular. […] Its aim is not so much to re-establish a balance as to bring into play, as its extreme point, the dissymmetry between the subject who has dared to violate the law and the all-powerful sovereignty who displays his strength. […] The ceremony of punishment, then, is an exercise of 'terror' […] [:] to make everyone aware, through the body of the criminal, of the unrestrained presence of the sovereign. The public execution did not re-establish justice; it reactivated power. (Foucault 1995: 48f)

It might be objected that public execution was and is different from warfare, yet nonetheless, in their common ritualistic forms, a connection can be established. By way of the public execution, "[t]he justice of the king was shown to be an armed justice. The sword that punished the guilty was also the sword that destroyed enemies" (Foucault 1995: 50). Public execution, in other words, always referred to and characterised the sovereign as warrior.

The song refers to these mechanisms of power in various ways.

a) At the same time as the song conjures up the pre-modern ritualistic logic of public execution, it turns it on its head. When the speaker asks that the drone "Lay my purple on the grass", she not only refers to the colour of her blood, but, since purple is the symbolic colour of royalty, she claims sovereignty for herself. This in turn suggests that what she is about to be subjected to – her being attacked and killed by a drone – is not the *punishment* for a crime committed against the sanctity of the law. It is *the crime itself*, committed against the sanctity of her person. In this sense, the sovereign is not a specific individual but all individuals – according to the modern belief in the sanctity and dignity of the person and his or her inalienable human rights. Sovereignty is claimed by each and every human being.

b) The crux with postmodern warfare, however, is that rituals of this kind have long lost their meaning. When the speaker begs the addressee to "Let [her] be the first / […] The one that you choose from above", the plea actuates traditional religious or mythic notions both of the holy victim and the saviour, accepted and chosen by God. However, the entity above is anything but divine; it is a so-called 'unmanned combat aerial vehicle', a machine whose signified is emptied out of all spirituality. The reference to her being elected therefore is perverse. Very often, those that use drones claim to defend and represent the ideology of human rights, but, while defending them, abuse them at the same time: as the Bureau of Investigative Journalism asserts, "under Obama over 3,000 people, including nearly 500 civilians, have been killed by drones" (n.d.: n.pag.) in

Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen and Afghanistan (cf. also Bergen/Rowland 2016: 13-17). Civilian casualties are accepted for 'the greater good'; they operate under the name of 'collateral damage'. As Michel Foucault has written concerning the workings of modern 'bio-power', "[w]ars are no longer waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of everyone […]. It is as managers of life and survival, of bodies and the race, that so many regimes have been able to wage so many wars, causing so many men to be killed" (Foucault 1990: 137). For instance, the special laws (Frontier Crimes Regulations) applying to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) permit "the state [of Pakistan] to ignore individual innocence and guilt", particularly when ordering so-called 'signature strikes', a predicament exploited by the United States (Fair et al. 2016) Moreover, while public executions in the age of sovereignty aimed at 'healing' the prior violation of the law, it is not even clear under which law drone strikes can be authorised (cf. e.g. Sterio 2012). As Hillel Ofek wrote in 2010 with respect to the CIA's drone programme:

> [O]n strictly moral grounds, it is difficult to see how the policies that President Obama and his supporters have rejected – subjecting known terrorists to indefinite detention at Guantánamo Bay, for example, or simulating drowning under the supervision of a physician and psychologist – are more repugnant than the policy he has endorsed: incinerating suspected terrorists and knowing, as a matter of course, that innocents will be killed. (2010: 42)

In the song "Obama", the deliberately disharmonic and musically monotonous centrepiece of *Hopelessness*, Anohni equally accuses the president of "Executing without trial", thereby "Betraying the virtues" he once appeared to stand for and for which he was elected.

From Discipline to Control

Nabil Elderkin's music video, by visualising Anohni's "Drone Bomb Me", negotiates the issues raised by the song from an alternative perspective.[3] For one, the mise-en-scène radically deviates from the expectations raised by the lyrics. We see neither mountains nor the sea, but a dark and gloomy space that immediately lets us think about interrogation rooms we know from films, television documentaries or the news. The wooden chair in the middle of the room is a rather clear reference to the electric chair still used by many US states in order to carry out the death penalty. To suddenly see British top model Naomi Campbell appear in the chair is surely irritating: her somewhat haughty gaze into the camera, her black-lacquered knee-high boots, and her camouflage-coloured jumpsuit hardly allow us to associate her with a helpless victim. On the

[3] The video can be accessed here: <https://vimeo.com/152637866>.

contrary, her appearance exudes authority and power, combined with a strong sexual allure. Although the camera angle is nearly on eye level, it is not quite: we have the impression of looking up at her. Another alienation effect is created when the shot distance changes into a close-up and Naomi Campbell suddenly begins to lip-sync Anohni's singing. It is as if Anohni's voice had left her own body and transposed itself, implanted itself, into that of another. The effect is two-fold.

On the one hand, distance is created. On their own, the lyrics present an asymmetrical relationship between a speaker who is bodily present and an addressee who is not: the addressee is in some other place but sends a physical proxy that is highly destructive, a proxy that embodies his dominating power.[4] The video re-establishes symmetry in that the speaker also leaves her body, equally communicating through a proxy (the character represented by Naomi Campbell). Distance is thus erected because the speaker removes her presence to a place where the observing addressee cannot observe her anymore.

On the other hand and at the same time, distance is reduced, because the speaker's proxy is not a destructive machine, but a human being. This becomes most obvious when we see Campbell's character shed tears: she demonstrates that she is capable of feeling pity, of empathising; she is capable of despair. Thereby, she perfectly comes to represent the ideal human being as hailed by Enlightenment philosophers and reformers in the second half of the 18th century: a thinking and feeling human being who is, according to Kant in "What Is Enlightenment?", "*more than a machine*" and therefore has to be treated "in keeping with his [or her] dignity" (1996: 22 [8: 42]). This image of human dignity is pitted against the notion of the unfeeling and unthinking drone. Humanity versus machinery.

However, to boil down Anohni and Elderkin's texts to this simple binary would do them an injustice. For instance, it could be objected that the soldier, safely hidden in a bunker in some faraway place, steering the drone, is *also* a human being. Yet as such, he does not fully accord with what idealistic late-eighteenth-century reformers like Kant had in mind, precisely because he must not dare to use his own understanding and think

[4] On 9 November 2016, the fateful day of the presidential election in the USA, Charlotte Wiedemann, when reassessing Obama's legacy, illuminatingly commented on the asymmetry implied in drone warfare and the status of its victims as 'post-truth victims': "Der Begriff vom asymmetrischen Krieg wurde einmal geprägt für Konflikte, bei denen wendige Guerillagruppen und Milizen auf konventionelle Armeen treffen. Heute gibt es eine andere Asymmetrie: zwischen Zivilisten und einer verdrohnten Kriegsführung. Einer Mode folgend könnten wir dies als typische Konstellation des postfaktischen Zeitalters bezeichnen. Wir sehen aus der Luft für einen Moment noch die Angehörigen der Opfer, die ihre erbärmlichen Forderungen in den Sandsturm brüllen, aber schon wenn die Bilder toter Babys im Netz auftauchen, wissen wir nicht, ob es Fake ist. Zu viele tote Kinder heutezutage im Netz. Postfaktische Opfer" (2016: 12). This indicates how the notion of an asymmetry between sovereign and capital offender, which was wholly transparent and capable of expressing an incontrovertible truth in the age of sovereignty, has been radically obscured in today's 'post-truth' societies of control.

for himself; he is reduced to what Kant somewhat confusingly calls the "*private use* of one's reason" (1996: 18 [8: 37]). The operator does not simply programme the flight path and actions of the drone of his own accord but, as a recipient of orders, has been pre-programmed on his part: his bodily movements when programming, his adherence to an operating sequence, all of it must happen within a carefully delimited sphere. His responsibility is a delegated responsibility. As such, then, he is the model representative of a disciplinary society in which "[d]iscipline defines each of the relations that the body must have with the objects that it manipulates. […] Over the whole surface of contact between the body and the object it handles, power is introduced, fastening them to one another. It constitutes a body-weapon, body-tool, body-machine complex" (Foucault 1995: 152f). Hence, instead of the philosophers' "dream of a perfect society", in which human beings respect their dignity as human beings and meet each other at eye level, the anonymous soldier that steers the drone represents what Foucault calls "a military dream of society" that, according to him, became hegemonic in the shaping of Western societies from the nineteenth century: "its fundamental reference was not to the state of nature, but to the meticulously subordinated cogs of a machine, not to the primal social contract, but to permanent coercions, not to fundamental rights, but to indefinitely progressive forms of training, not to the general will but to automatic docility" (1995: 169).

Nonetheless, it is certainly necessary to bring Foucault's insights, which primarily refer to the constitution of modern state power in the 19th century, up to date in order to meet the realities of today. As Gilles Deleuze suggested in "Postscript on the Societies of Control", by the end of the 20th century, the disciplinary spaces of enclosure (family, school, barracks, factory, prison, hospital) had begun to transform. Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, they have lost their strict boundaries, their systemic autarchy, and instead opened up and become modulatory elements in a dynamic network of control. Implicitly, this state of affairs is captured in Anohni's song: it is no coincidence, of course, that the speaker's gaze moves upwards, not to heaven, but to the open spaces of a sky emptied of God, to the clouds out of which a drone will (perhaps) shortly emerge. Arguably, this sky is indicative of the emergence of a transnational public space, for which the organisation of cyberspace has been described as symptomatic. In Slavoj Žižek's words:

> [By] organizing cyberspace into 'clouds' […] details are abstracted from consumers, who no longer have need for expertise in, or control over, the technology infrastructure 'in the cloud' that supports their activity. Two words are revealing here: *abstracted* and *control* – in order to manage a cloud, there needs to be a monitoring system which controls its functioning, and this system is by definition hidden from users. The paradox is that, the more the small item (smartphone or iPod) I hold in my hand is personalized, easy to use, 'transparent' in its functioning, the more the entire set-up has to rely on the work being done

> elsewhere, in a vast circuit of machines which coordinate the user's experience. (2015: 57)

The question remains whether Anohni's speaker and her interpretation by Elderkin can offer anything that subverts this conception of a society of omnipresent control. Can the speaker herself represent a valid counter-conception?

Fashion, (Dis-)Empowerment, and Complicity

In September 2016, *ZEIT MAGAZIN* (No. 37, 1 Sept. 2016), a supplement to the German weekly newspaper *DIE ZEIT*, featured Naomi Campbell on its black-and-white cover.[5] The photographer Horst Diekgerdes shot her from a slightly low angle so that again the impression of her looking down at us from a position of superiority was created. She bears the same haughty expression as in Elderkin's video, which is underlined by her wearing a black leather jumpsuit and elbow-length leather gloves. Very matter-of-factly, the caption identifies her as "Naomi I.", granting her the status of royalty. The inside cover, again featuring Campbell, explains that this is "Ein Modeheft über Frauen und Macht" ("A Fashion Issue on Women and Power"). The article on Campbell, which revolves around a rather brief interview she gave *ZEIT* reporter Carolin Würfel, attempts to characterise her as having an unusually powerful status for a fashion model:

> No one wants to make any mistakes, because Naomi Campbell won't forgive them. Her irascibility is legendary: she is probably the most unpredictable and at the same time most powerful model in the world. She has succeeded in achieving something normally impossible for models. Usually, models don't wield any power, they wear clothes without owning them. Their bodies are young and thin and flawless and disappear behind designers' and photographers' ideas. […] Not so Naomi Campbell. She has never disappeared. For thirty years, she has been part of the fashion business. And she has never appeared to be costumed. (2016: 31, my translation)[6]

Despite these assurances, the article leaves the reader somewhat unsatisfied in that it hardly explains why Naomi Campbell is supposed to inhabit a position of power. What does her power consist in? Simply in the fact that she is still around while many of her age-mates of the 1990s supermodel generation have disappeared from the runway?

[5] The cover can be accessed here: <http://loveandpr.com/2016/09/naomi-campbell-for-zeit-magazine/>.
[6] The original reads: "Niemand möchte einen Fehler machen, denn die verzeiht Naomi Campbell nicht. Sie ist legendär reizbar: Das wohl unberechenbarste und gleichzeitig mächtigste Model der Welt. Damit ist ihr etwas gelungen, was für Models eigentlich unmöglich ist. Models haben gewöhnlich keine Macht, sie tragen Kleider, ohne sie zu besitzen. Ihre Körper sind jung und dürr und makellos und verschwinden hinter den Ideen der Designer und Fotografen. [...] Nicht so Naomi Campbell. Sie ist nie verschwunden. Sie ist seit 30 Jahren im Modegeschäft. Und sie wirkte auch noch nie verkleidet."

According to Jean Baudrillard, fashion itself is the "completed form of political economy" (1993: 87); it is the prime indicator of a condition in which all reference to the structure of reality is abolished while reality becomes the effect of the play of signs:

> Fashion is not a *drifting* of signs – it is their *flotation*, in the sense in which monetary signs are floated today. […] All cultures, all sign systems, are exchanged and combined in fashion, they contaminate each other, bind ephemeral equilibria, where the machinery breaks down, where there is nowhere any meaning [*sens*]. Fashion is the pure speculative stage in the order of signs. There is no more constraint of either coherence or reference than there is permanent equality in the conversion of gold into floating monies[.] (1993: 92)

In view of that, Campbell can be read as a sign not of her own power, but of the power inherent in late-capitalist economic cycles. The vague prowling around a definition of Campbell's power in Carolin Würfel's article is therefore no accident: it precisely grasps the ungraspable nature of a code that makes concrete references impossible. Power literally lurks in the margins, in the small print located vertically on the sides of the pages: it is here that we find the signs that truly organise this 'fashion issue on women and power': "Cover 1: Kashmirtop mit Lederbesatz, Kaschmirhose und Handschuhe von Hermès" (2016: 5 ["cover 1: cashmere top with leather trimming, cashmere trousers and gloves by Hermès"]). Before we come upon the first article proper on page 18, we are confronted with 14 (!) pages of fashion advertisements, some of them double-page – by Gucci, Prada, Bottega Veneta, Giorgio Armani, and the like. In this way, as Nina Power has put it succinctly, "Feminism™", the sort of 'liberating'-cum-hip feminism propagated here, "is the perfect accompaniment to femme-capital™[.] […] Capitalism, which in a sense knows no morals (or at least can change them easily), couldn't care less about the positive, happy, 'feminist' reclaiming of sex so long as it makes a buck out of skimpy nightwear and thongs" (2016: 29, 32). Seen from this angle, the notion of feminist empowerment that Würfel finds in Campbell is illusory.

Unsurprisingly, the same criticism could be levelled against Elderkin's video. As the closing credits reveal, the art director of the video is Riccardo Tisci, a prominent Italian designer who was also responsible for staging Campbell with clothes by Givenchy. Analogous to acclaiming Naomi as a fashion queen by the *ZEIT MAGAZIN*'s title, "Naomi I.", Tisci in one scene endows her with a cap (0:53-0:56) that is reminiscent of a crown and maybe even quotes the aureola crowning the head of the Statue of Liberty. However, the possible concomitant invocation of either a symbolic, pre-modern and non-capitalist order structured by ritual (crown) or a liberal order structured by equality (Statue of Liberty) is a ruse: it is an effect of the hyperreality of the fashion code itself (cf. Baudrillard 1993: 90). This in turn has radical consequences for the value of the body within the economic logic of the code. Through the nearly unrestricted flotation of images of bodiliness, the body in fact loses its corpo-reality and thereby its

distinctiveness: "Abandoned to the signs of fashion, the body is sexually disenchanted, it becomes a *mannequin*, a term whose lack of sexual discrimination suits its meaning well. […] Nothing is sexed any longer, everything is sexualised" (Baudrillard 1993: 97). Is the half-naked Naomi in Elderkin's video not expressive exactly of this dilemma? Does not the video itself, as well as Anohni's song, instead of subverting the logic of late capitalism, rather confirm it? Is it not an expression of what Mark Fisher has termed 'capitalist realism', a "turn from belief to aesthetics, from engagement to spectatorship" (2009: 5)? And don't we, who are watching the video, all correspond to Fisher's capitalist-realistic persona of the 'consumer-spectator' (cf. 2009: 4)? Yes, surely, and Anohni is perfectly aware of it. As she said in a long interview with *thump*:

> A lot of the theme about the record is my own complicity. What's my part in this in the way that I approach things, in my dysfunction, in my own brokenness? What's my complicity in this in the way I'm lying to myself? Such as: I'm not to blame for global warming. Executions aren't my fault. I'm not responsible for Obama's drone bombing campaign. I'm a plane-taker; I'm a tax payer. We're all complicit. (Anohni, qtd. in Friedlander 2016: n.pag.)

Indeed, from within Western consumer societies, complicity is inescapable. Yet if there is any chance of subversion, then its seed lies in exactly this self-awareness. It is in the strange dichotomy between dis-embodiment and re-embodiment that is created when Anohni's voice suddenly and strangely erupts from Naomi Campbell's mouth that the late-capitalist aporia sketched by Baudrillard becomes tangible. As Anohni said repeatedly in interviews, what was intended was to revive the ancient idea of a female oracle (cf. e.g. Friedlander 2016; Raffeiner 2016: 27). The crux with oracles, though, is that they are inherently ambiguous, *uneindeutig*: that they require interpretation.

Dis-/Re-Embodiment and Death

In the 2006 project *Turning*, a cooperation with the filmmaker Charles Atlas, Ahnoni had already experimented with the idea of dis-/re-embodiment. Back then, she still used the name she was born with as a boy in Chichester, England, in 1971: Antony Hegarty. Basically, the film documents a concert Antony and his band, Antony and the Johnsons, gave at the Barbican Centre, London, on 5th and 6th November 2006. During each song, a different female model, who stood on a rotating platform at the right side of the stage, was being filmed and the images projected onto a huge screen behind the band. Through this strategy, Antony and his band, though standing in the foreground, were not merely complemented by the female model. Rather, their bodily presence was overwritten by her doubled appearance. Ultimately, the project sought to undermine the usual strategy of turning models into empty signifiers, and instead attempted to restore to them the

'reality' of their bodies and their voices, particularly by way of the interview sequences that match the concert recordings on an equal footing.

If Baudrillard is right and "in fashion […] sex is lost as difference" (1993: 97), then the film both radically confirms and, by performing fashion and sex/gender, exposes this predicament. Significantly, the interviews as well as the other documentary sequences show that all the models are outside of the 'norm', since most of them are transgender people or transsexuals. The sequences make us aware of how much they have had to suffer under the imperatives of a hetero-normative society for being 'different': how much their life, in order to productively define life for those that stand for the norm, has been relegated to a death-in-life – what Judith Butler refers to as "living under the sign of the 'unlivable'" (1993: 3). Their status as representatives of 'perverted sexualities', then, is a direct result of strategies that characterise modern bio-power: "We […] are in a society of 'sex,' or rather a society 'with a sexuality': the mechanisms of power are addressed to the body, to life, to what causes it to proliferate, to what reinforces the species, its stamina, its ability to dominate, or its capacity for being used." (Foucault 1990: 147). Since they allegedly cannot meet these demands (reproduction, health, domination), transsexuals and transgender people have been located at the marginal space between life and death.

At one point, we see Antony backstage, encouraging and advising the women about how to cope with the situation on stage:

> Maybe, perhaps, tonight, you could imagine – if you're tired – you can imagine that you're actually already dead and that you're just a skeleton. And let the wind be alive, the wind blowing through your bones. So everything that's dancing through you is elements. Do you know what I mean? It's wind, it's water, it's ice and snow and fire. Just elements are blowing through you, your dead body, your skeleton. So you're just gone completely. You can be asleep. (*Turning* 2014: 55:31-56:00)

Very explicitly in the speech, though maybe unintentionally, Antony/Anohni hints at the fact that late capitalism, while giving the impression that it is all about life, actually is grounded in death. These models, as Antony suggests to them, should pretend to be dead; and for the performance following this speech (of the song "Twilight"), one of them has actually been costumed and painted as a skeleton. What is demonstrated in the performance is that power in late capitalism is upheld by the deferral of death, a deferral which at the same time, paradoxically, devalues and deadens life.

> If power is death *deferred*, it will not be removed insofar as the *suspension* of this death will not be removed. And if power, of which this is always and everywhere the definition, resides in the act of giving without being given, it is clear that the power the master has to unilaterally grant life will only be abolished if this life can be given to him – in a *non-deferred death*. (Baudrillard 1993: 40)

It should be mentioned at this stage that death, for Baudrillard, in this sense is not real but *symbolic*. And it is this symbolic death that the speaker of "Drone Bomb Me" claims as a right for herself. Unfortunately – and the high artificiality of Elderkin's video makes us painfully aware of it – there are still too many innocent people out there who will die real deaths by bombs in whose production and employment we are complicit.

Conclusion: The Abuse of Army Equipment

In this respect, it is worthwhile to at least briefly go beyond the lyrics of "Drone Bomb Me" and consider the (status of the) music. While the music of Antony and the Johnsons has a solemn, melancholy, and 'baroque' tone and has often been identified as 'chamber pop' for its use of traditional 'analogous' instruments like strings, piano and horns, Anohni's solo album seemed to signify a radical generic reversal in that *Hopelessness* is an electronic album, co-produced by two central representatives of the field, Hudson Mohawke and Oneohtrix Point Never. In *SPEX*, a bimonthly German 'magazine for pop culture', Arno Raffeiner has illuminatingly characterised Anohni's transformation as a strategy of camouflage: "*Hopelessness* is radical enlightenment, which surreptitiously seeks to obtain as much attention as possible by way of camouflage. […] Anohni insistently refers to *Hopelessness* as a 'dance record', even though the impulses to movement aim less at arse-wiggling than at clenched fists" (2016: 27, my translation).[7] Analogous to Judith Butler's argument in *Gender Trouble* that "[*i*]*n imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency*" (1999: 175), it can be claimed that Anohni's various acts of camouflage – in her own appearance and via projects like *Turning* and *Hopelessness* – are also aimed at denaturalisation, at exposing the constructedness of certain cultural givens. To be more precise, what Anohni's musical camouflage reveals is that pop music as such is the product of an act of camouflage: while pop music is often associated with the enjoyment of life (the huge majority of pop songs deal with love; they are danceable; they are used for the purpose of diversion etc.), its medial origins are of a military nature. In other words, as Friedrich Kittler has set forth, 20th-century popular music (he focuses on rock) has only become possible through technological innovations developed in the context of modern warfare:

> It's a beautiful symmetry: just like the abuse of army equipment constructed for the trench warfare of 1917 led to medium wave monophony, the abuse of army equipment constructed for blitzkrieg scenarios with tank divisions, bomber and

[7] The original reads: "*Hopelessness* ist Radikalaufklärung, die sich mit den Mitteln der Camouflage möglichst breite Aufmerksamkeit erschleichen will. [...] Anohni bezeichnet *Hopelessness* beharrlich als 'dance record', auch wenn die Bewegungsimpulse weniger auf Wackelärsche als auf geballte Fäuste zielen[.]"

> submarine squadrons led to rock music. […] [S]ince storage and transmission technologies have nearly reached their optimum by now, the 'impressive experience reports' from war and *Gründerzeit* years run on in all presents and futures. Every discotheque, which obviously amplifies audiotape effects and couples them with the appropriate stroboscope and flashlight visual effects in real time, brings back the war. And more than that: instead of only reproducing pasts, it trains for a strategic future, whose mastery might otherwise founder on people's thresholds of perception. (2002: 21, my translation)[8]

Anohni's "Drone Bomb Me", therefore, is more than simply a reminder of the evils of drone warfare. The complicity that it addresses slyly transcends the level of signification presented by the lyrics. It also transcends that of the catchy synthesiser harmonies and the insistent beat. The complicity is inescapably inherent in the medium itself, in its obscured technological and strategic origins, as well as its means of production and distribution, for which the camouflage jumpsuit that Naomi Campbell wears in Elderkin's video functions as a fitting indicator.

In this sense, pop music is not merely a symptom of contemporary power constellations; it is a constitutive part. Surely, the power it exerts lies in its propensity to make our bodies move like coiling snakes, but maybe also in the way it trains us to habituate ourselves to a highly artificial and ever-increasing complex of sense stimuli, and in the strategies it employs to make us accept that life is as virtual as death. On the one hand, "Drone Bomb Me" and the other songs on *Hopelessness* serve as proof of exactly this state of affairs; they are its products. On the other hand, by insisting on the inevitability of our complicity and on the necessity of accepting our responsibility, they at least do not give up on the hope of making a difference. That's something, right?

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[8] The original reads: "Es gilt in schöner Symmetrie: Wie der Mißbrauch von Heeresgerät, das für Stellungskriege von 1917 konstruiert war, zur Mittelwellenmonophonie führte, so der Mißbrauch von Heeresgerät, das für Blitzkriege aus Panzerdivisionen, Bombergeschwadern und U-Boot-Rudeln konstruiert war, zur Rockmusik. [...] [W]eil Speicher- und Übertragungstechniken mittlerweile schon fast ihr Optimum erreicht haben, laufen die 'eindrucksvollen Erlebnisberichte' aus Kampf- und Gründerzeiten weiter. Jede Diskothek, die ja Tonbandeffekte noch verstärkt und in Echtzeit mit der entsprechenden Optik von Stroboskopen oder Blitzlichtern koppelt, bringt den Krieg wieder. Mehr noch: sie trainiert, statt nur Vergangenheiten zu reproduzieren, eine strategische Zukunft an, deren Bewältigung an Wahrnehmungsschwellen der Leute scheitern könnte."

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